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Message Text

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ACTION NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W
----------091897 271247Z /53
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4453
INFO MEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE 1299
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S E C R E T TEL AVIV 9524

EXDIS (DIST AS NODIS)

JERUSALEM FOR ATHERTON

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR PEPR IS EG
SUBJ: WEIZMAN'S WORRIES

1. AFTER A MEETING WITH AMBASSADOR LEONARD FROM USUN JULY 25, I HAD A CANDID PRIVATE TALK WITH EZER WEIZMAN ABOUT THE TROUBLED STATE OF PEACE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND EGYPT. HE WAS IN A VERY APPREHENSIVE MOOD--FEARING A MOMENTARY PHONE CALL SAYING THAT HIS TEAM IN ALEXANDRIA WAS BEING SENT HOME. (UNFORTUNATELY, HE PROVED TO BE ALL TOO PRESCIENT.)

2. WEIZMAN WAS DEEPLY CHAGRINED AT THE HAM-HANDED WAY BEGIN HANDLED SADAT'S PRIVATE SUGGESTION TO WEIZMAN ABOUT THE "EL ARISH GESTURE." HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT IT COULD NOT HAVE BEEN DEALT WITH HERE IN A MORE PROVOCATIVE OR INSULTING FASHION, AND HE WENT SO FAR AS TO ASK ME WHETHER IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN BETTER IF HE HAD NEVER GONE TO SALZBURG AT ALL. HE SAID HE HAD AN EXCELLENT, ENCOURAGING MEETING WITH SADAT, BUT BECAUSE OF THE WAY THE EL ARISH ISSUE WAS SUBSEQUENTLY TREATED HERE IT MAY
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HAVE DONE MORE HARM THAN GOOD. ON HIS RETURN FROM SALZBURG, HE HAD URGED BEGIN TO KEEP THE EL ARISH IDEA BETWEEN THE TWO OF THEM FOR THE TIME BEING, BUT BEGIN HAD INSISTED IT HAD TO GO BEFORE THE CABINET. THEN, OF COURSE, HE HAD DRAMATIZED THE CABINET'S REJECTION OF THE WHOLE IDEA.

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3. WEIZMAN WAS VERY MUCH AFFECTED BY BEGIN'S MESSAGE TO SADAT HAVING BEEN REJECTED. HE WAS ALMOST DESPAIRING ABOUT HOW TO GET THINGS BACK ON THE TRACK AGAIN AFTER THE EVENTS OF THE LAST FEW DAYS. I TRIED TO BUCK HIM UP AND TO STRESS OUR DETERMINATION TO PERSEVERE. I SAID WE STILL ASSUMED WE WOULD BE ABLE TO CALL A MEETING DURING SECRETARY VANCE'S TRIP TO THE AREA, TO INCLUDE BOTH DAYAN AND HIM. BUT I MADE CLEAR THAT WE WERE NOT YET AT ALL SURE IT WOULD TAKE PLACE.

4. WEIZMAN TELEPHONED ME EARLY WEDNESDAY MORNING (JULY 26) FOR A FURTHER EXCHANGE OF VIEWS. HE HAD PASSED A SLEEPLESS NIGHT AND WAS ANXIOUS TO KNOW WHETHER WE HAD ANY FURTHER WORD, "FROM ACROSS THE NILE." HE SAID HE HAD TALKED TO DAYAN WHO WAS EQUALLY CONCERNED, AND THAT THE TWO OF THEM WOULD BE CONSULTING LATER IN THE DAY. HE SAID THAT BOTH HE AND DAYAN WERE FRANKLY VERY WORRIED ABOUT BEGIN'S PRESENT MOOD: COMBATIVE, EFIANT, AND EXCEEDINGLY AFFRONTED BY BOTH THE PERSONAL ATTACKS ON HIM IN THE CAIRO PRESS AND THE UPROAR HERE STEMMING FROM LABOR PARTY CHARGES THAT HE IS PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY UNEQUAL TO THE TASK OF BEING PRIME MINISTER. EIZMAN ASKED WHETHER I THOUGHT I COULD HAVE AY HELPFUL INFLUENCE ON BEGIN AND PARTICULARLY ON HIS STATE OF MIND. I SAID I WAS NOT SANGUINE, BUT THAT I WOULD SEE WHAT MIGHT BE DONE WHEN I SAW HIM LATER IN THE DAY.
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5. WEIZMAN TELEPHONED ME IN THE EARLY EVENING TO CONVEY THE SAD NEWS THAT HIS ALEXANDRIA TEAM WAS BEING ORDERED HOME. HIS FOREBODINGS HAD BEEN BORNE OUT. HE REMINDED ME THAT BACK I MARCH, WHEN HIS DIALOGUE WITH GAMASY WAS FIRST INTERRUPTED, HE HAD SADLY PREDICTED HIS TEAM WOULD BE HOME BY THE END OF JULY--AND "THE WAR DRUMS WOULD BE BEATING BY OCTOBER." HE SAID HE WAS GOING TO CONTINUE TO SEARCH FOR SOME WAY TO KEEP DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE EGYPTIANS, DESPITE EVERYTHING. "WE'VE TRIED FOR THIRTY YEARS TO ACHIEVE SUCH A DIRECT LINK; NOW THAT WE HAD IT, I'M NOT GOING TO GIVE UP EASILY."

6. WITH THE THREAT OF ANOTHER MAJOR SADAT SPEECH LOOMING, WITH THE DOMESTIC IN-FIGHTING BETWEEN THE OPPOSITION AND THE GOVERNMENT BECOMING EXCEEDINGLY SHARP AND PERSONAL, AND WITH THE WIDE GAPS BETWEEN THE EGYPTIAN AND THE ISRAELI POSITIONS BECOMING CLEARER ALL THE TIME, WEIZMAN IS IN A DISCOURAGED AND ALMOST DESPERATE MOOD. HE REMAINS CONVINCED THAT AN AGREEMENT WITH EGYPT IS POSSIBLE, YET ADMITS THAT BEGIN' APPROACH IS BECOMING MORE AND MORE UNPRODUCTIVE. INTERESTINGLY, HE SAYS

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THAT BEGIN HAS BEEN GOING OUT OF HIS WAY THE LAST WEEK
TO BE NICE TO HIM ON A NUMBER OF ISSUES, PROBABLY
REFLECTING BEGIN'S SENSITIVITY TO WEIZMAN'S MENTAL
TURMOIL AND THE IMPLIED THREAT THAT HE MIGHT AT
SOME POINT RESIGN. IT IS OBVIOUS THAT BEGIN CONTINUES
TO PLAY WEIZMAN LIKE A VIOLIN. LEWIS

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